

Why NAWG Supports Climate Change Legislation

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Though not an easy decision, the National Association of Wheat Growers supported passage of climate legislation approved by the House of Representatives in late June. This is a controversial position on a controversial issue, but one we feel was made with a sense of practicality and inevitability.

We've known for a long time that the agricultural sector will face heavy costs through any sort of greenhouse gas regulation, and that this regulation is increasingly near on the horizon.

Many in Congress and President Barack Obama are highly motivated to see the federal government act to reduce emissions, and the Supreme Court ruled in 2007's *Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency* that greenhouse gases, or GHGs, pose a human health hazard and can be regulated under the Clean Air Act. Just a few months ago, EPA took the first steps to carry out that ruling, opening the door to regulation of emissions including those from agricultural producers, their livestock and their machinery. As much as farmers might like to just be left alone, there is no way to dodge this bullet.

But it's also quite clear the agricultural sector provides the best near-term solution to the concerns climate change legislation seeks to address. Agriculture producers have the opportunity to provide significant mitigation from emissions and generate billions of dollars in carbon markets. In fact, EPA itself has said agricultural offsets can reduce the cost of any climate change legislation by 150 percent or more.

Knowing both of these things, NAWG has worked over the past few years to help put the industry in a position to benefit as much as possible under any GHG regulation scheme. The recently-passed climate change bill contains a number of key provisions of great importance to the our industry, including, importantly, an exemption for agriculture and forest owners from any GHG regulation and the authorization of an offset credit program implemented and operated solely by the Department of Agriculture.

The reality is that either scenario – legislation or top-down regulation - is going to be costly for farmers and many other sectors in the economy. The only question now is how costly. Though we don't have an exact figure associated with the recently-passed House bill, we believe and history suggests it will be much less expensive than leaving it to EPA to write the rules.

The big picture is clear: agricultural producers have the opportunity to participate in carbon markets and make money in the process. Or producers can choose not to be part of the legislative process and accept regulation from EPA or legislation that does not include ag offsets.

We fall firmly on the side of giving producers the chance to mitigate their own energy costs as well as generate new markets.

- Scronce is a wheat producer from Klamath Falls, Ore.